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论《宠儿》和《慈悲》中的黑人母性

Empowerment, Liberation and Cultural Heritage:

On Black Motherhood in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*

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Abstract

Toni Morrison, the 1993 Nobel Prize Winner of Literature, is one of the most distinguished African American writers. As a black female, she can enter the inner world of black women, thus gaining a profound understanding of their life. Thus, she shows great concern for the marginalized groups, especially black women. Motherhood is a recurring theme in her works with portrayals of black mothers troubled by racial and gender discriminations. Morrison, through her novels, shows how black mothers who are bearers of traditional African culture as well as children's nurturers should cherish their mother identity and shoulder the responsibility of handing down traditional values.

Different from Morrison, many white feminists view motherhood as oppression in women's identity. To Morrison, motherhood is a source of power for both black women and children. However, because the dehumanizing slavery deprives black women of their right to play the role of a mother, black motherhood becomes one of the sources of black women's tragedies. This thesis aims to explore the influences of slavery on black motherhood and see how black mothers break these bondages to fulfill their maternal duties.

This thesis includes four chapters. The first chapter reviews academic studies on motherhood. Among these, Patricia Hill Collins' black motherhood study is discussed in detail for its concentration on colored women and its relevancy to the analysis of Morrison's works. The second chapter examines motherhood as identity in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. Three kinds of mothers are discussed, including bloodmother, othermother and community othermother. The identity as a mother gives black women encouragement and strength, thus providing a foundation for their self-actualization. The third chapter studies different maternal expressions and mother-daughter relationships during three historical periods: pre-slavery, slavery and post-slavery. In *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, Morrison views motherhood against the

background of slavery to see the different features of motherhood in different historical periods, while emphasizing the influence of slavery on black motherhood. The fourth chapter probes Morrison's own views on black motherhood and new development in her representation of black motherhood in *A Mercy* so as to further disclose Morrison's feminist thoughts on motherhood.

This thesis comes to the conclusion that set in the historical background, with impressive stories and superb narrative techniques, Morrison's works are of great value in motherhood study. In a word, Morrison has illustrated how and why motherhood is affected and distorted by slavery as well as the dominant culture of racism. Meanwhile, she reveals the necessity for the colored women all over the world to recover the true value of maternal love and reclaim their cultural heritage through the common bondage of motherhood.

Key Words: black motherhood; *Beloved*; *A Mercy*; slavery; identity

摘要

1993 年诺贝尔文学奖得主托尼·莫里森是一位杰出美国黑人女作家。黑人与女性的双重身份使得莫里森对黑人女性的境遇有着独到而深刻的见解。母性是莫里森作品中反复出现的主题之一。她塑造的黑人母亲形象常常为种族和性别歧视两大枷锁所束缚。莫里森通过其小说号召作为孩子的抚养者和非洲传统文化承载者的黑人女性珍视她们的母亲身份并且承担起传承传统文化价值的历史使命。

许多白人女性主义者把母性看作是对女性身份的压迫；但对于莫里森而言，母性是母亲和孩子的力量之源。然而，由于灭绝人性的奴隶制剥夺了黑人妇女做母亲的权利，因而母性成为黑人女性悲剧的根源之一。本文意在探求作品中所揭示的奴隶制对黑人母性的影响以及黑人母亲如何打破枷锁来履行她们的母亲职责。

本文共分为四章。第一章概括了关于母性的学术研究，详细论述了柯林斯的黑人母性理论，以此作为文本分析的基础。第二章深入分析了《宠儿》和《慈悲》中构建的母亲身份，着重论述了三种母亲身份：生身母亲，养母和社区母亲。母亲身份赋予黑人女性以勇气和力量，同时为她们的自我实现打下了根基。第三章进一步论述了前奴隶制、奴隶制及后奴隶制三个不同时期中母爱及母女关系的不同特点。在《宠儿》和《慈悲》中，莫里森以奴隶制为背景再现了不同历史背景赋予母性的不同特征，尤其反映了奴隶制对黑人母性的影响。第四章意在探寻莫里森对黑人母性的独特见解以及其在新作《慈悲》中的文学表征所体现的新发展，论述莫里森对于母性的女性主义思考，揭示她在《慈悲》中如何打破种族对母性的局限，从而对母性的文学再现做出了巨大贡献。

本文结论部分对莫里森小说中的母性主题表现进行了总结。莫里森小说的宏大的历史背景、感人至深的情节以及高超的叙述技巧，对研究黑人母性有着极高的参考价值。总之，莫里森揭示了奴隶制和以种族主义为主导的主流文化是如何影响和扭曲黑人母性的。与此同时，她揭示了全世界有色妇女重获母爱价值的必要性以及冲破母性枷锁传递历史文化遗产的重要性。

关键词：黑人母性 《宠儿》 《慈悲》 奴隶制 身份

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厦门大学博士论文摘要库

Introduction

As the first African American Nobel Prize laureate in literature, Toni Morrison has exerted profound influence upon the literary world. Her success signals the arrival of the era when the African American literature gets on the stage of American and world literature. Up till now, Morrison has published nine novels, one play, one short story, several essays, as well as some children's books. Love as the source of creation and destruction is an important theme in her fiction. From her first novel *The Bluest Eye* to her latest *A Mercy*, motherhood has always been one of her major themes. In Morrison's depictions of motherhood, the thick and distorted maternal love under slavery is impressive. With a history of more than 200 years, slavery has greatly influenced Americans' lives. It breeds racial discrimination as well as self-hatred in the black community. It is so dehumanizing that both the black and the white are reluctant to recollect it. However, it is necessary to remember in order to challenge the cherished American myth of the Promised Land, and revise the foundations on which narratives of the American history were built. As far as the themes of both slavery and motherhood are concerned, Morrison's *Beloved* and *A Mercy* are certainly worthy of our critical attention.

Beloved, Morrison's masterpiece, tells the story of a slave mother killing her child to forestall the latter's fate of being a slave. Like the thick maternal love in *Beloved*, *A Mercy*, the latest Morrison novel published in 2008, explores the theme of motherhood through an equally shocking story about a slave mother selling her daughter, Florens. Since its publication, *A Mercy* has been called a prequel to *Beloved*. As Miller observes, "if *Beloved* can be described as an attempt to see what slavery was like—to depict its historical and psychological influence, *A Mercy* is an attempt to see what could have been had slavery not taken full root in the New World, a tale of America 'before it was America,' in Morrison's words" (Miller, 2009: 23). The same theme developed in a similar context provides the possibility of exploring these two

novels together. *A Mercy* is set at the beginning of slavery, while the story in *Beloved* takes place towards the end of slavery. They together present a historical overview, which enables us to explore different features of motherhood in different contexts of slavery.

Academic research on motherhood arises with the development of the second-wave feminist movement. Adrienne Rich's work *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* serves as the first systematic study on motherhood. The years following its publication in 1976 witness a series of creative studies on this subject from different perspectives. Among them, in her essay entitled "Don't ever Forget the Bridge that You Cross over on": The Literature of Matrilineage", Nan Bauer Maglin seeks to recover the lost tradition of the mother-daughter relationship. She defines the lost tradition as the literature of matrilineage, and in which she gives a simple schema for identifying this term:

1. the recognition by the daughter that her voice is not entirely her own;
2. the importance of trying to really see one's mother in spite of or beyond the blindness and skewed vision that growing up together causes;
3. the amazement and humility about the strength of our mothers;
4. the need to recite one's matrilineage, to find a ritual to both get back there and preserve it;
5. and still, the anger and despair about the pain and the silence borne and handed on from mother to daughter. (Shi, 2004: 3-4)

Although the white feminists have contributed a lot to the development of motherhood theory, they only focus on the situations of white middle class women. Therefore, due to the racial and class limitations, their theories are not applicable to the black women. In trying to make their voices heard, African American women have to develop their own feminist theory. One of the most outstanding scholars to analyze black women's motherhood is Patricia Hill Collins who defines motherhood as an institution, which consists of a series of relationships that black women experience with one another, with their children, with the black community and with self. Collins discusses three kinds of black mothers: bloodmother, othermother and community

othermother. They together form the basis of black women's network. Black motherhood is a site for black women's empowerment, where they build up their status in the black community. With its focuses on colored women, Collins' black motherhood theory provides a new perspective to examine motherhood in Morrison's novels.

In the past 40 years or so, Morrison's works has inspired a large quantity of criticism. According to Zhu Rongjie, Morrison research can be mainly divided into three periods. In the 1970s, Morrison's earlier novels often invite feminist scrutiny, and later deconstruction and anthropological approaches are adopted to explore Morrison's use of mythic structure and her subject of female self-discovery. In the 1980s, psychoanalytic perspective as well as culture criticism is applied to analyze Morrison's novels. In this period, a new development in the cultural criticism of Morrison's work comes with an increasing focus on her characters as standing at the interface of two or more cultures. At the end of the 1980s, anthropological and cultural critical approaches are applied to analyze Morrison's "use of community, myth and a jazz and /or blues aesthetic" (2004). During the 1990s, narratology, feminism and anthropological /cultural criticism have been brought together in the discussion of Morrison's fiction in relation to narrative strategies and female discourses. As Linden Peach summarizes, in his revised edition of *Toni Morrison*, the latest development in Morrison criticism is the tendency to stress the interconnection of history, memory and trauma. Morrison's works are full of cultural and historical implications. In order to have a thorough and correct understanding of her works, the net-work of historical and cultural factors should be included in discussion.

As to Morrison's motherhood theme, critics have done a lot of research from various perspectives. In the U.S., this theme is explored mainly from psychological as well as feminist perspectives. In *Selfhood and Community: Psychoanalysis and Discourse in Beloved*, Jennifer Fitzgerald first uses pre-Oedipal discourse of object relations to analyze the relationship between Sethe and Beloved. In *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*, another American scholar Andrea O'Reilly provides a critical reading of motherhood and mothering complexly depicted in

Morrison's novels from *The Bluest Eye* to *Paradise*. She closely "scrutinizes Morrison's texts, essays, and interviews as well as other critiques of Morrison to theorize about African American women's everyday experiences and political practices, which has been largely neglected by white feminists" (Mori, 2006: 177). In China, there are also many scholars who have turned to this research. Morrison has been widely accepted in China since she won the Nobel Prize in 1993. According to Du Zhiqing, up to the end of 2006, the number of critiques on *Beloved* has increased to 118, which makes up 30 percent of the sum total number of critical essays on Morrison in China. Morrison's novels are analyzed from various perspectives, among which post-colonialism, feminism or black feminism are most frequently applied. Critics often pay attention to black women's self-construction, motherhood, the importance of the African tradition or black community. Zhu Rongjie's *Pain and Healing: A Study of Maternal Love in Toni Morrison's Fiction from a Cultural Perspective* mainly discusses the cultural implications of the loss and reclamation of maternal love in Morrison's fiction. Tian Yaman, in her *Maternal Love and Growth*, explores the importance of maternal love in the growth of children through analyzing Morrison's novels, from *The Bluest Eye* to *Paradise*. In addition, there are still many MA and PhD candidates who choose Morrison's motherhood as the subject of their research.

Due to the interlacing racial, gender and class oppressions, black motherhood has distinguishing features. The white-middle-class-centered motherhood theory cannot be applied to black women due to its reductionistic tendency. On the contrary, Collins' theory of black motherhood is created specifically for the black women. Collins brings the marginalized black women into the center with a highlighted discussion of black women's everyday life. Based on Collins' black motherhood theory, this thesis focuses on black motherhood in Morrison's *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, and examines motherhood in two aspects: the identity as mothers, including bloodmother, othermother and community othermother; mother-daughter relationships and maternal love. In addition, Morrison's unique views on black motherhood and her new development on motherhood represented in *A Mercy* are also explored.

The body of this thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter traces the development of motherhood theory and introduces Collins' views on black motherhood. White feminists, such as Adrienne Rich and Nancy Chodorow, contribute a lot to the development of motherhood theory. However, because of the limitations of race and class, their studies of motherhood center on white middle class women. They tend to neglect their black counterparts. Thus Collins puts forward black motherhood theory in her famous work, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. She analyzes motherhood and mother-daughter relationships, focusing on black women only.

The second chapter examines motherhood as identity in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. Apart from its definition as an institution at the social level, motherhood can also be defined as an identity as far as an individual is concerned. The identity as a mother gives black women encouragement and strength, thus providing a foundation for their self-realization.

The third chapter studies black maternal expressions and mother-daughter relationships in three historical periods: pre-slavery, slavery and post-slavery. Slavery plays an important role in shaping black motherhood, as it attributes a lot of uniqueness to black motherhood. In other words, the evolvement of black motherhood is closely related with the development of slavery. The three characteristics of black motherhood are discussed in detail in this chapter: expectations of pre-slavery mothers, desperation of slave mothers, and their psychological trauma after slavery.

The fourth chapter aims at probing into Morrison's own views on black motherhood and her new development in *A Mercy*, her latest novel published in 2008. In this chapter, Morrison's nine novels are examined together to summarize her unique view of black motherhood and the new development of her representation of motherhood in *A Mercy*.

Morrison's theme of black motherhood is so complicated that without the exploration of the cultural and historical implications, it is hard to have a positive understanding of her maternal figures such as Eva in *Sula* and Sethe. However, according to Zhu Rongjie, up till now there is no such "a systematic analysis of

Morrison's fictional presentation of black motherhood in relation with her black feminist thoughts expressed in various interviews" (2004). Nonetheless, this lack of critical attention does not change the fact that the theme of motherhood is a major issue in Morrison's fiction. On the contrary, it indicates that there is still enough space in the interpretation of Morrison's black motherhood. In this case, this paper systematically explores black motherhood in three historical periods to enrich Morrison study on black motherhood.

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